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1 March 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Comments on "The Meo of Northeast Laos: The Waning of a Tribe"

1. Per your 28 February request, I have read the latest (28 February) version of the Meo memo with great care. As you know, an earlier draft was telepouched to the field for comment by [ ] and [ ] and the [ ] This latest version reflects the field comments and corrections. I have discussed this latest version with [ ] who shares my thoughts as outlined below.

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2. The Meo memo is a first-class, very impressive piece of research, analysis and writing. As all who have read it (both here and overseas) have noted, it does great credit to those who put it together -- especially [ ] its principal drafter, who drew on a lot of good work done by the Vietnamese Station. The question before the house, however, is not the quality of the paper as a piece of analysis (undisputably excellent) but whether it should be disseminated externally as an Agency memorandum and, if so, to whom and under what controls.

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3. Laos, as you well know, is a complex topic on which there is a wide spectrum of strongly held views within and, particularly, outside the U.S. Government. The Agency's role in Laos is a topic of special complexity and controversy. It is clearly our duty to do what we can to enlighten the policy levels of the U.S. Government on important matters of major policy concern. It is not our duty, however, to cut our own throat or hand our critics sharp instruments to facilitate their doing so. Also -- a fact of life that cannot here be ignored -- the practical likelihood of controversial official documents on Indochina leaking, especially ones relating to Agency activities, has to be recognized as very high at the present time. Hence, we have to be particularly careful about publishing documents with passages or material that could be used as ammunition in an attack on the U.S. Government, its Indochina policies, or the Agency's role therein.

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4. The above considerations are germane to your decision on dissemination of the Meo memo because it perforce treats two particularly controversial and highly charged matters:

- a. The Meo's traditional role as growers of poppies and producers of opium as their major cash crop.
- b. A key cause/effect argument on whether (1) U.S. (Agency)-backed military operations in north Laos were necessitated by aggressive Communist pressure directed and increasingly supported from Hanoi or (2) these operations were not necessary and, in fact, prompted or stimulated Hanoi's energetic intervention thus, in effect, causing the Meo to be destroyed as a people.

5. I urge you to read the memo carefully yourself and make your own judgments. As you will note, I have made a number of editorial suggestions. These have two objects:

- a. To tailor the prose on the opium question to avoid statements against interest, without masking facts or tampering with the truth. It is clearly not in our interest to publish an official Agency document containing prose that in or out of context could be used to support the charge that we have been directly or indirectly subsidizing the production of or traffic in opium.
- b. To adjust statements on the causality issue in order, again, to avoid comments clearly against interest but (I hope) without doing violence to the author's basic arguments and judgments.

6. In addition to the editorial fixes offered for your consideration, there are four paragraphs -- 77, 78, 79, and 80 -- that I simply do not agree with and think should be dropped. I may be wrong -- and am sure the memo's able author would argue that I am -- but these paragraphs contain a line of analysis I personally do not buy. Basically, I think these paragraphs ignore certain essential factors to a degree that makes them unrealistic. Rather than belaboring the point here,

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however, I will simply state my strong convictions with the offer of further oral or written argument for them should you desire it.

7. My net recommendation is that with editorial fixes along the lines suggested, the memorandum should be given limited dissemination to -- and only to -- Dr. Kissinger, Secretary Rogers, Secretary Laird, Admiral Moorer, and Mr. Sullivan. It should go out with a cover note personally signed by you that stresses the memo's political sensitivity. If handled this way, I think it will make a helpful contribution and do the Agency credit. If it is given any wider dissemination, however, it is almost certain to reach hostile hands in the press or Congress and be used as a source of ammunition against the Government and the Agency.



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George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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